A PORTRAIT OF AN IRAQI NOVELIST AS A YOUNG MAN, 1948 - 1950

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In 1946 Shim'on Ballas joined the illegal Iraqi Communist Party (henceforth: the ICP).[1] He was 16 years old. He recalls how his bourgeois family objected to his becoming a member of a party comprised of "these barefooted people," while he came to feel solidarity with, and value the opinions of, Iraqis of various classes through his party activities. Ballas recalls his participation in the Wathba, a series of demonstrations which protested the government's pro-British policies:

> *These were the days … when I marched arm in arm with demonstrators whom I have not known before, and when I loudly called to topple the government of national betrayal, to release political prisoners, and to have free elections….*
>
> *They [the communists] courageously fought publications that incited against the Jews in the rightwing press…. In demonstrations along al-Rashid Street the demonstrators called: "We are the brothers of the Jews; we are the enemies of imperialism and Zionism!" I remember this rare sight, how as the demonstration approached the commercial and banking area, and, as this*

slogan was chanted by the demonstrators, merchants and bankers, all Jews, came out to the balconies and clapped their hands enthusiastically.[2]

Ballas's attraction to communism sprang from both national-Iraqi and Jewish concerns. On the one hand, Ballas was in step with the majority of his peers, Jewish and non-Jewish alike, who were critical of the state's pro-British elite and its antidemocratic nature, typified by its violations of human and welfare rights. His marching in the anonymous crowd bolstered his convictions that his concerns were also the concerns of the Iraqi people. On the other hand, the communist pro-Jewish position made him proud of his political affiliations, and, moreover, elicited the enthusiastic responses to the ICP on the part of Jewish merchants and bankers, who did not normally support a communist agenda.[3]

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Ballas's ideological choices resemble those of fellow Jewish Iraqi radicals; in fact, a significant number of young Iraqi Jews joined the ICP during the 1940s. Nonetheless, apart from Joseph Me'ir's path-breaking study in Hebrew, very few studies have been written about this phenomenon.[4] The historiographical silence with respect to the involvement of large parts of the Jewish youth in an Iraqi project shortly before their migration to Israel is to be attributed to a few factors. First, the excellent literature written on the ICP, especially Hanna Batatu's magnus opus, tended to focus on the leadership of the party.[5] Moreover, thanks to the appearance of memoirs written by the ICP leaders in recent years, like the autobiographies of Baha' al-Din Nuri, Zaki Khayri and 'Aziz al-Hajj,[6] the party's internal politics, its dynamic relationship with the state, and its functions as an opposition movement during the Hashemite period were explored at length.[7] Yet little attention was paid to the workers and students who affiliated themselves with the ICP and to the individuals who participated in strikes, distributed communist leaflets and newspapers like al-Sharara and al-Qa'ida

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and demonstrated in the two grassroots waves of urban rioting against the state, the Wathba (1948) and the Intifada (1952). Second, the literature written on the communists under the Ba'th was extremely hostile to the ICP. When Jews were mentioned in this context, it was usually in order to question their loyalty to the state.[8] Third, some Iraqi Jews who immigrated to Israel were reluctant to evoke their communist past. While communist Iraqi Jews like Shim'on Ballas, Sami Michael, Menashe Khalifa, Musa Huri, Eliyahu 'Ezer and Hesqel and Ya'qub Qujman joined the Israeli Communist Party, others, including the Jewish founder of the Iraqi communist League for Combating Zionism ('Usbat Mukafahat al-Sayahuniyya), chose to integrate in the new state and conceal their "sordid" communist past.[9] The literature on Iraqi Jews written in Hebrew highlighted the major role the Zionist movement played amongst the Jewish youth, thus neglecting communist Jews, or at least viewing their positions as perilous to the Jewish community and to the vision of a Jewish national state.[10] In recent years, revisionist literary scholars underlined the integration of Jews in Iraqi culture and devoted considerable space to describing prominent Iraqi Jewish intellectuals (writers, novelists, poets and journalists) who were affiliated with the state and played an important role in the Hashemite state and its cultural institutions.[11] These intellectuals, however, tended to stress the positive features of the Hashemite monarchy and viewed the communism of the radical Jewish youth as jeopardizing their incorporation into the state and challenging their national visions. Finally, the affiliation between Judaism and communism in Iraq was a short one; it started at about 1945 and came to a halt in 1952, when most members of the Jewish Iraqi community left Iraq.

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Nonetheless, despite its short time-span, the Jewish-Iraqi communist experience is of immense importance. First, uncovering Jewish communist history in Iraq gives us a glimpse into the life of Iraqi Jews from an unusual perspective. In the context of the Iraqi Jewish community, the term "Arab-Jew" is often evoked in order to describe a class of educated

middle class Jews who saw themselves as members of the Iraqi national community. Postcolonial critics like Yehouda Shenhav[12] and Ella Shohat[13] currently use this term not only to signify the identity of Jews living in Arab countries who saw themselves as an integral part of Arab society but also as a critical way to think about Zionism and its discriminatory practices with respect to Israel's non-European Jewish population. By placing the emphasis on the transformation of Arab-Jews into Israeli citizens, however, such an analysis misses the tensions embodied in the term. In Iraq of the 1940s, many Jews could be identified as Arab-Jews. Nevertheless, Jews who worked for, and enthusiastically supported, the Hashemite monarchy, were very different from their contemporary Jewish communist peers, who were persecuted for their political beliefs by the very same state. Both groups were extremely critical of Zionism and saw themselves as Iraqi patriots, yet their perception of the state, its relationship to Britain and the United States, their understanding of the term "nationalism," and the sociocultural contexts in which they operated were radically different. The possibility of studying Iraqi Jewish communists thus turns our attention to a significant group of Iraqi Jews who identified with the Iraqi nation, yet were highly critical of the Iraqi state.[14]

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Second, exploring the phenomenon of Iraqi-Jewish communism complicates our understanding Iraq of the late 1940s and early 1950s and the opposition to the Hashemite monarchy. The ICP in Iraq grew stronger in these years. In 1941, Iraq's ultranationalist and Pan-Arabist camp suffered a devastating loss when a nationalist coup led by Rashid 'Ali al-Gailani was defeated by Britain.[15] The mass waves of jailing and deportation of radical Pan-Arabists that came with the British reoccupation in 1941 created a vacuum in the intellectual scene. In tandem, the British eased censorship regulations with respect to Russian, communist and Soviet publications during the war. The small ICP (established in the mid1930s) was consequently able to regroup and emerge as an important power. After the war, the ICP made use of a short time period when democratic freedoms were granted to Iraqis.

This period of tolerance was brief, yet the ICP, although never legalized, utilized this short interlude to attract the youth to its ranks. The accounts of communist Jews from this period provide crucial evidence regarding the ways in which the ICP expanded its support base and fashioned itself as a social movement aspiring to a radical change during the postwar years.(16)

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Finally, the public sphere of the 1940s and early 1950s was influenced by Leftist thought. Iraq of these years experienced a cultural and literary renaissance, as new works of poetry and prose appeared in the print market. While many writers did not affiliate themselves officially with ICP, the effects of communist and socialist ideas amongst the intelligentsia were overwhelming. Educated Jews read these publications. The activities of Iraqi Jewish communists can therefore exemplify how the new ideas circulating in the print market were translated into political action.(17)

From the sources available to us, we learn that Jews in Iraq began joining the ICP mostly after 1945. The party attracted students and educated young men from the middle- and upper classes, and likewise members of the urban poor and the lower middle classes. In this essay, I wish to reflect on a source that sheds important light on the lives of Iraqi communist Jews, namely, the autobiography. Outwardly, autobiographies are a problematic account as the author's representations of his or her past seek to address contemporary audiences, whose perceptions of the past shape the biography narrated in the text. Autobiographies, moreover, are not only a historical genre, but also a literary one, subscribing to particular sets of norms and expectations. Autobiographies in Hebrew are even more challenging, predominately because they are written to a non-Iraqi, often Zionist, audience. Their authors are therefore apologetic at times concerning their decision to act as Arab patriots, rather than Jewish nationalists. Some authors even fashion their self-image as native informants to an Israeli

audience, that is, as experts on the lives of Arabs and Jews in Middle Eastern countries. Nonetheless, reading against the grain of such accounts, and deconstructing each auto-bio-graphy, reveal important tensions between the auto (self) and the graphia (writing), namely the representation of the self by writing, on the one hand, and the bio (life), namely, the life-story of the biography's writer, on the other. As times, emotionality, longing and affection color the experiences narrated in such texts. These autobiographies, despite their authors' intentions, thus express nostalgia for Iraq, reflect on texts written in Arabic that their authors read and loved, appropriate narratives and symbols emblematic of the Iraqi national discourse, and celebrate affection and love to childhood friends and family members who remained in Iraq. Likewise, the need to explain to a Jewish-Israeli audience the choice of communism is occasionally beneficial to historians since authors often dwell at length on the motivations which inspired them to join the ICP. Such explanations, while frequently apologetic, do provide useful information as to ideological choices made by Iraqi Jews.[18]

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The autobiography I explore in this essay is Salim Fattal's In the Alleys of Baghdad (Be-Simta'ot Baghdad).[19] Salim was born in Baghdad in 1930 and was active in the ICP. In 1950, he arrived to Israel (after a short stay in Iran). After the realization of Stalinist horrors, Salim abandoned his pervious communist beliefs. He worked in the Arab press and in the Israeli radio, where he produced documentaries on lives of Jews in Iraq and North Africa. His Hebrew autobiography appeared in 2003 in Israel. It was dedicated to "the second generation, so that they would know something about their roots" and to the author's wife, children, and grandchildren.

The book's blurb seems less than promising as it pledges to debunk the "myth" that Jews and Arabs enjoyed good relations prior to the establishment of the state of Israel. The book

will do so, readers are told, by presenting Baghdad of the author's childhood: "a magical city of wisdom and astuteness, yet also a site of gallows and pogroms against Jews; where revenge triumphs over forgiveness, zealotry over patience, and the sword, the emblem of heroism and masculinity, determines the relationship between human beings." Unexpectedly, however, the very same book contains much information about Arab-Jewish coexistence in Iraq and about Jewish-Iraqi patriotism. I therefore read the autobiography in order to ascertain further insights about Jewish-Iraqi relationship, and about the affiliation of Jews to the ICP. I do not analyze the actions of the party's leaders with respect to Iraq's Jewry, but rather focus the actions of a young Iraqi Jew who decided to join the ICP: What were his ideological condensations for joining the party? What was his understanding of communist and socialist ideology? And, most significantly, how can his accounts help scholars produce a more nuanced history which is different from the histories written thus far about both the ICP and the Iraqi Jewish community?

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Supporting Mr. Mustache

Salim came from a poor family. He was orphaned from his father at a young age and his family, namely, Salim, his mother and five brothers, grew up in the poor Jewish neighborhood of Tatran. As a child, Salim attended Jewish schools whose teachers employed (unjustly, in Salim's opinion) corporal punishments and severe modes of discipline. In contrast, his high-school, al-Ma'had al-'ilmi ("The Scientific Institute"), was a night school where the majority of teachers and students were not Jewish. His studies at the night school enabled him to familiarize himself with other segments of Baghdadi society. He befriended Muslim students during the evenings, and worked in various book-keeping jobs during the day. Salim changed several positions, but most of his employers were Muslim Shi'is.

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Despite being integrated by schooling and labor into Iraqi society, Salim, unlike upper and middle class Baghdadi Jews, stresses in his memoirs the religiosity of his family. From his early youth, Salim felt he was connected to "the Jewish tradition, the family, the tribe, the (Iraqi) nation, and the state."(20) He affectionately recalls how his grandfather told him stories about the heroes of the Bible, and exposed him to the Jewish tradition. Most Jews in his neighborhood were likewise religious and often discussed religious matters, although their understanding of the Bible was not unreservedly accurate. For example, in one amusing incident depicted in the text, the Jews of Tatran scan the Bible and medieval Jewish poetry in the hope of finding clues that will interpret the Soviet decision to support the partition of Palestine in the UN, a religious exploration that combines the poetry of Judah ha-Levi, the Bible, popular religious beliefs, and more current Soviet politics.(21)

Given Salim's respect to the Jewish tradition and to the religiosity typifying his family background and his neighborhood, his decision to become a communist seems unanticipated. Salim himself is aware of this fact, and subsequently ruminates about the reasoning behind his determination to become a member the ICP.

> *My joining to the communist party in the beginning of 1948 was not the result of a careful study of the writings of the fathers of communism […]. In my home I used to hide the library of the district and could read its books as much as I wanted. I looked at them very rarely. The lectures [in the communist cell] bored me to death. The underground was not built thanks to these lectures. It was built by the famished, by those who woke up in the morning not knowing whether they would have something for dinner […], by the poor who lived in the*

> *margins of society, discriminated against and humiliated […]. I was amongst those who lived in this filthy pit. I needed no textbooks in order to fight for survival […]. Poverty and anger were the teachers who crafted generations of strugglers. From here, the way to the communist underground was well-paved and short.*(22)

While some communists, like the Jewish Shim'on Ballas or the Kurdish 'Aziz al-Hajj, present their affiliation to communism as (at least in part) a result of reading Iraqi books about Marxism, translations of European Marxists and socialists into Arabic and Kurdish, and communist works in the original European languages, Salim discloses that the texts by, and lectures of, Iraqi communists had very little to do with his joining the party. In other places in the text, Salim reveals that he loved reading, wrote a diary and was involved in an Arabic literary club. Yet for him, the main reason for enlisting into the ranks of the ICP was first and foremost the social context to which he belonged. Economic hardship and destitution overcame religious differences, as the sense of marginality united many of the people of the neighborhood and its surrounding. Here the autobiography acts as a powerful commentary on the texts historians use to reconstruct the history of the party. Notwithstanding its romanticizing elements about the unity of the oppressed, Salim's confession indicates that the illegal publication of the ICP – its books printed in Dar al-Hikma publishing house, the pamphlets it circulated, its illegal newspapers and the speeches delivered in public meetings – were not always effective in addressing the youth. The shared feeling of discrimination, on the other hand, pushed Salim to communism. He professes that the ICP armed him with new ideals of freedom, equality and social justice, which he felt were sorely lacking in his socioeconomic milieu, and which he identified as the solutions for his hardships. Moreover,

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the ICP spoke of the revolution. "I felt flattered that I, the skinny one, am carrying on my thin shoulders a great message that would give tormented humanity eternal values."[23] The ICP, then, promised to fight "the evil kingdom" and offer in its stead a vision of peace and equality.[24]

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Salim's communism also mirrored a particular historical context:

Growing up I believed in all honesty that I was a model Iraqi citizen, and that Baghdad, the city of my birth, was my fortress. My ancestors were part of its landscape. They were born in it, lived in it and buried in it for generations. They came to this city years before the Muslims arrived, and presented the city with spiritual and material assets. And there was I, in the very same land, a son of the same old dynasty, trying to integrate in the new Iraqi society, as any other human-being. Nonetheless, my passionate desire was rejected with much contempt. I discovered that I did not belong. My family did not belong. My tribe, that lost some of its sons in Iraq's wars, did not belong. My uncle was murdered in the 1941 pogrom and his body was thrown into one of the pits in [the neighborhood of] Bab al-Sheikh. He certainly did not belong. […]. Thus, on the verge of 1948, I stood, with the rest of my community, together with all of those who did not belong. Estranged and alienated; disappointed and affronted; protesting and angered.[25]

Communism, accordingly, was "the only serious option for those who were stuck and wanted to belong."[26]

Salim represents his choice of communism

as an act of Iraqi patriotism. He highlights his commitment to the Iraqi nation, underscoring those elements that made him a part of the national community: a shared geography, a sense that the Jews were an old Iraqi tribe that contributed much to Iraq's history and culture, and a common historical memory. While his fellow compatriots rejected his desire to belong, communism bestowed Salim with a feeling of integration.

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Salim's impressions were grounded in historical realities. Albeit critical of nationalism, the communists' publications did accentuate their patriotism and their concern for Iraq's economic and political sovereignty.[27] Most importantly, the communists protected the interests of the Jewish community by calling not to equate Judaism with Zionism. The leader of the party, Yusuf Salman Yusuf (Fahd, 19091949-), declared as early as 1945 that the pro-British Iraqi government "treats the Arab Jews [al-yahud al-'arab], who have no connection with colonialist Zionism, and who have lived with us for several generations without any confrontation, as if they are responsible [for Zionism] and takes revenge on them."[28] He argued that the Iraqi government could not call itself anti-Zionist while enjoying the support of those who were behind the Zionist intervention in Palestine. While the Iraqi state fallaciously claimed to hold a pro-Palestinian position, it used Iraqi Jews, who had nothing to do with Zionism, as scapegoats, although it was supposed to protect them as citizens of equal standing.[29] Becoming a communist was thus not only a marker of belonging to the international revolution of the proletariat, but also an act of affiliation with the Iraqis struggling to secure their political sovereignty and their basic freedoms and an association with a political group that was perceived as pro-

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Jewish and anti-sectarian.

Salim mentions the death of his uncle in 1941 as yet another factor behind his embracement of communism. In the first and second days of June 1941, after the failure of Gaylani's coup, as the British were about to reoccupy Baghdad, but prior to their entrance to the city, over a hundred and seventy Jews were murdered in Baghdad and many others wounded and robbed, in a series of urban riots that came to be known as the Farhud.[30] The victims of the Farhud were mostly poor Iraqi Jews, as the rioters kept away from the richer Jewish neighborhoods. For Iraqi Jews, the coup, and the Farhud, created a crisis of orientation. In the 1930s, Jewish Iraqi nationalists like Anwar Sha'ul and Ezra Haddad sought to create an Arab nationalism anchored in the Arabic language, Arab history and Arab culture.[31] However, during the 1930s, some Pan-Arab ultranationalists turned to Fascist, Nazi and other totalitarian and antidemocratic models as a source of inspiration.[32] The radical Jewish youth active during the 1940s blamed the Pan-Arab camp for the Farhud and maintained that the Arab cultural affiliations espoused by the previous generation of Iraqi Jews could not serve as the only signifiers of the Iraqi national character.

The ICP itself was very critical of radical Pan-Arabism. Although the communists supported the Kaylani movement,[33] they denounced the attacks on Iraqi Jews in a direct and uncompromising manner.[34] The ICP of the 1940s likewise critiqued those Iraqis who supported Nazism and Fascism as collaborators with the powers of international imperialism, a position that seemed very appealing to Iraqi Jews. After 1941, the ICP, like its equals in the rest of the world, presented the war against Germany as a global war of liberation. Salim, however, also describes how the Soviet War against Nazi Germany was a much discussed topic in the Iraqi print market as Arabic poems about Stalingrad were comprised in Iraq. The autobiography likewise elaborates how the Soviet victory was translated in the popular imagination. It is not surprising that Stalin's speeches were studied in Salim's communist cell, since Fahd and

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other leaders of the ICP referenced Stalin in their writings and followed Soviet instructions. Yet Salim also describes how Stalin became a local "god" in his neighborhood. Poor Jews, he writes, admired Stalin and named him Abu Shawarib, "Mr. Mustache."[35] Furthermore, unlike upper and middle class Jewish communists who shared the bitter disappointed of their Muslim and Christian comrades following the Soviet decision to support the partition of Palestine,[36] in Tatran, the Soviet stance was greeted with much enthusiasm. For these poor Jews, as for Salim, it appeared as the continuation of Abu Shawarib's support to the Jewish people.

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Ella Shohat and Joel Beinin cautioned historians of Arab Jewry not to follow a universalizing path which assumed that Middle Eastern Jewish history subscribed to the same trajectory as European history.[37] While supporting this position, it is important to note the similarities between communist European Jews and communist Iraqi Jews, precisely because both looked at the Soviet Union as a power that would be able to offer a vision of equality and battle anti-Semitism, right-wing nationalism, and discrimination. Moreover, narratives such as Salim's could also be used to defuse various historical analyses which, considering Iraq's unique sectarian and ethnic background, underscore the exceptionality of Iraq as a state and a society. Salim's autobiographical accounts suggest that the experiences of the people of Tatran, and the political options they adopted, were shared by other social groups at the time in different parts of the world.

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Nonetheless, Salim's narratives also bear a very particular Iraqi character which speaks of Stalin as the local hero of the neighborhood, indicates how poor Jews combined religiosity and admiration of the

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Soviet battle against Fascism, and locates the rise of the ICP within the poor neighborhoods of Baghdad. These experiences were also shared by other groups in Iraq. As Marion Farouk-Sluglett and Peter Sluglett have shown, the ICP also attracted poor Shi'i migrants who resettled in Baghdad, a group which constituted a major part of the Baghdadi urban poor, and whose poverty and destitution resembled those of the Jewish denizens of Tatran.(38) Curiously, Salim's recording of his life-story resembles some of the accounts of present-day Islamists. Disappointment from the state's failing social policies as well as a feeling of estrangement and frustration turn him into a radical whose self-representation is constructed upon his loyalty to the nation and the people, on the one hand, and his rejection of the state and the regime, on the other. This feeling was emblematic of the sentiments expressed by Iraq's radical and secular youth during the 1940s and 1950s.

Protesting and Rebelling

Salim's actual contact with the ICP started in his high-school, al-Ma'had al-'ilmi. His Muslim classmate, Muhammad al-Janabi, was captivated by radical communist politics and paved the way for his friend's joining the communist underground. Muhammad, moreover, "believed in Jewish-Arab brotherhood and was the first to tell me: you are my brother."(39)

The event that solidified Salim's political positions was the Wathba (January 1948). The Wathba was a series of mass demonstrations against the state. It began with popular protests against the proposed Portsmouth Treaty with Britain, which preserved Britain's geo-strategic interests in Iraq, but turned into a massive outburst against the lack of democratic freedoms and social justice in Iraq. The communists did not plan the Wathba, yet they made extensive use of the popular rage that was conveyed in the riots and demonstrations.(40) For Salim, the Wathba started in discussions amongst the neighborhood's coffeehouse-dwellers about the proposed treaty with Britain. It was then followed by a passionate rally in his high-school, organized by his friend Muhammad al-Janabi, in which the latter addressed his fellow students:

Brothers! The motherland is in danger [….]. Demonstrators are shut as wild dogs […]; the whole of Iraq is crying and bleeding, wailing and grieving, and where are we? On the school bench? They are being killed while we listen to our classes? What would history say of us tomorrow?(41)

The students applauded Muhammad and soon joined the demonstrators. The school's principle tried to convince the students to focus on their studies, and avoid all political activities. Ultimately, however, the principle was forced to stand by helplessly, and watch his students denouncing "the government of blood" and demanding basic freedoms for workers and students.

Salim portrays his night school as a center for the communist underground, because most of its students were poor. His own initiation as a radical began with the actions of his schoolmate, Muhammad. In that, Salim was no different from many other Jewish communists who referred to their schoolmates as the individuals who first introduced them to the ideals of communism and to the ICP as their high schools and universities, despite being monitored and supervised by the state, became hubs of radical activities.(42) Salim, then, learned about brotherhood and equality, about Iraq's role in history, and about the ways in which history will judge Iraqis, not from his teachers, but rather from his fellow students.

Salim, like his classmates, joined the demonstrations of the Wathba, marching and crying against British imperialism and the jailing of the leaders of the ICP. His desire to be part of the Iraqi nation was materialized spatially, as he became a part of the marching crowd that had no racial, ethnic or religious features, and was simply a great mass moving in the city's streets.

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I remember the first man killed in the Wathba. His name was Dahham, an anonymous porter who symbolized that class of the poor and the oppressed, living on the margins of society. […]. The porter's bag, sucked with his blood, was hanged on al-Ma'mun

Bridge, close to where he had died, and was a memorial of the uprising.(43)

The poor, whom Salim previously identified as the ultimate victims of the state, now become a symbol of the Wathba. The new memorial in the city, the porter's sack, is not constructed by the state, but rather by demonstrators, in order to commemorate their suffering and the regime's violence. Salim reveals that following the Wathba a feeling of Euphoria overtook the ICP, since the coordinated movement of the masses in Baghdad seemed to authenticate the message of the coming revolution. All events, he writes, seemed to have happened according to what was predicted in the party's slogans and pamphlets.

Jews at the time spoke of the Wathba as an important anti-sectarian moment in which Iraqis, Jews, Muslims and Christians alike, acted as a unified block, despite sectarian differences and the war in Palestine.(44) In fact, the Wathba steered attention from the failing campaign in Palestine into what had transpired in Iraq itself. The autobiography marks a correlation between the historical and the personal; just as the Wathba singled out a new, more violent and radical era in Iraqi politics and history, it was likewise the first major event in which Salim participated as a young communist.

Not all events, however, were as dramatic, and as violent, as the Wathba. The communist activities Salim was engaged with revolved around his tiny cell led by a member called 'Adil, whose real name was Samir 'Abd al-Ahad (the party ordered members to use pseudonym because of security concerns). The ICP had a hierarchical structure that included a central leadership and sub-groups divided into districts and smaller cells. Salim's reflections record what transpired in such smaller groups, and explicate how the ideas of the ICP were transmitted to the urban poor and the students. His activities in the cell centered on a number of foci: participation in demonstrations, carrying posters and slogans of the party, and hiding in his home the district library, whose artifacts were discussed in cell meetings by members.

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The meetings in the small cell concentrated on 'Adil's explorations of the Communist Manifesto and other current events. The district library that served the cell included

Marx's Das Kaptial and three English books, like Stalin's Dialectic Materialism, as well as Marxist books in Arabic. Nonetheless, Salim (the elder) seems quite amused as he contrasts the immodest ambitions of the cell's leader with the bitter Middle Eastern realities. He likewise reports that 'Adil's passionate speeches often left very little impression on himself and his fellow comrade, Ra'uf. The activities in the small cell, which Salim so meticulously (and often humorously) describes, were important in that they allowed the young students who read local newspapers and listened to the radio to place current events within a larger communist narrative, and to make sense of the changing realities surrounding them.

Cell members also participated in rallies, public meetings and demonstrations. One such demonstration took place by cinema Ghazi. The members of 'Adil's cell met with other members by the cinema. They hid posters whose slogans protested against imperialism and the Iraqi "blood government." Once they united with other comrades, a small convey of some forty people began picketing and marching. This group converged with yet another group that turned into a group of about a hundred young men, who rallied in the street crying out against "Anglo-American imperialism."(45) The demonstration was crushed by the police, as some thirty policemen, armed with clubs, attack the young group of demonstrators. Salim recalls how he and his comrade Ra'uf managed to escape and find refuge in one of the nearby neighborhoods. The tenants in the poor neighborhood were glad to shelter the young students, whose education they respected and whose struggle they esteemed. "A Muslim man, about fifty, hid us in his home and treated us as if were his own children."(46)

Salim, then, learned about brotherhood and equality, about Iraq's role in history, and about the ways in which history will judge Iraqis, not from his teachers, but rather from his fellow students

The fact that these events are represented in terms borrowed from the realm of the family (Muhammad is Salim's brother, a fellow Muslim treats him as his own child) is worthy of note. Such terminology was frequently employed in nationalist discourses in order to represent the subject's connection to his nation and his homeland. In the communist context, this representation was utilized as a way of accentuating the anti-sectarian dimensions of the ICP activities, in which a poor Muslim man treats a Jewish communist

as his son. While the discrimination of Iraqi Jews motivated Salim to join the ICP, it was his friendship with Muhammad al-Janabi who saw him as a brother, and the willingness of fellow Iraqis to hide him that consolidated his relationship with the party, and more broadly, with the nation.

Clearly, discussions about current affairs or the distribution of posters, the activities Salim associates with his communist cell, presented no danger to the Iraqi state. Nevertheless, the collective action of numerous tiny cells, such as Salim's, had meaningful results, as seen in the participation of the young communists in the demonstrations and in the Wathba. From Salim's accounts it seems that the ICP, when acting amongst the urban poor, did not necessarily attempt to convince them of the grand theories of Marx, Lenin or Stalin. Instead, the communists wanted to convey the idea that the ICP will attend to the needs of people and that in moments of strikes or of state violence it will take notice of their fellow citizens' needs.

Jews at the time spoke of the Wathba as an important anti-sectarian moment in which Iraqis, Jews, Muslims and Christians alike, acted as a unified block, despite sectarian differences and the war in Palestine

Being Persecuted

Given Salim's romanticizing and idealized construction of social solidarity amongst Iraq's urban poor, readers are left with a troubling question: If communism was indeed the key for a true Jewish integration in Iraqi state and society why did Salim leave Iraq?

Salim admits that his family's religiosity could have easily induced him to adopt Zionism as an ideology which would help him cope with the discrimination of Jews in Iraqi society, by offering a form of Jewish national identity. Nonetheless, in spite of reading about the land of Israel in the Holy Scriptures, this land seemed to Salim and his family like a romantic dream. More crucially, Salim argues that the Zionist underground aimed at rich Jewish families that could sponsor their travel to Israel, and paid no heed to poor Jewish families. "As far as I was concerned, if there was, indeed, a Zionist revolution in the land of Israel, it happened on another planet."[47] In addition, the Arab media presented a very negative image of Zionism, while the religious leadership of the Jewish Iraqi community rejected Zionism as a

possible solution to the Jewish question. The communists in Iraq, alternatively, "suggested another solution, an Iraqi solution, and were very successful in competing for the souls of the educated Jewish youth."[48] (emphasis mine)

Yet being a communist in Iraq in the post Wathba era was not an easy matter at all. Salim vividly captures how, when communist activities were concerned, Iraq resembled a police-state whose various arms spread around the city. As his school was an important communist center, the police spied on students and encouraged students to spy on their classmates. Consequently, the communist students acted very cautiously, lest they will be betrayed by their own peers. Not only students, but also the school's administration became involved in the state's supervision efforts. Salim testifies that his high-school principle subscribed to the state's modes of supervision. For example, he summoned Salim to his office and inquired about his whereabouts, making sure he was not involved in any subversive activities. Salim also recalls that a police detective attempted to rescue information from him regarding his friend Muhammad al-Janabi.[49]

The district library that served the cell included Marx's Das Kaptial and three English books, like Stalin's Dialectic Materialism, as well as Marxist books in Arabic

After Salim's participation in a demonstration and especially after the arrest of his cell's leader, his fears grew and he found it difficult to focus on his studies. His fears were justified. Shortly after 'Adil's arrest, the police awaited Salim in his high-school principle's office. He was taken home where his library was searched for suspicious materials. Although the police detective was able to locate the district's library, he was uneducated, and, not knowing English, was incapable of realizing that one of English books in Salim's library was in fact written by Stalin. Nonetheless, Salim was taken to a police station and locked in a filthy, dark cell. After spending a whole night in the cell, without food and proper sanitation, and recalling horrific rumors of torture and persecution of fellow communist prisoners, including prisoners who took their own lives in jail, Salim was brought to the investigation room. There, an officer questioned him about his workplace, and pressured him to provide names of fellow communists and report about the political activists of the communists in his

Salim recalls how he and his comrade Ra'uf managed to escape and find refuge in one of the nearby neighborhoods. The tenants in the poor neighborhood were glad to shelter the young students, whose education they respected and whose struggle they esteemed. "A Muslim man, about fifty, hid us in his home and treated us as if were his own children."

high-school, especially those associated with Muhammad al-Janabi. Salim managed to avoid giving away any meaningful information by pretending he knew nothing about the communists. He insisted that all he cared about was his academic career. In effect, however, what enabled Salim to resist the investigator's attempts to rescue information was the short time he spent in the police station. His uncle, a man with connections to people in high places, in particular to police-officers, was able to bribe Salim's way out of jail. Salim was first moved to a cell with a bed, where he was given a loaf of bread, and was finally released. Although the whole experience did not last more than a few days, its effects were long-lasting.

While the discrimination of Iraqi Jews motivated Salim to join the ICP, it was his friendship with Muhammad al-Janabi who saw him as a brother, and the willingness of fellow Iraqis to hide him that consolidated his relationship with the party, and more broadly, with the nation

The general atmosphere in the streets of Baghdad was as difficult to bear as the surveillance in schools. In 1949, the execution of the ICP leaders shocked Salim. The four leaders of the ICP, Fahd, Husayn Muhammad al-Shabibi, Zaki Basim, and Judah Sadiq, a Christian, a Shi'i, a Sunni, and a Jew, were hanged in different spots in Baghdad. (50) The affects of the hanging on the ICP was devastating. Whereas scholars like Batatu emphasize how the party lost its chief ideologues and organizers, Salim's records the personal effects of state's terror on his psyche and daily conduct. The fact that a Jewish communist was executed was of immense importance to Salim.(51) He went to see the body of Sadiq.

> *I stood in the square where Judah Sadiq was executed. Around me gathered a crowd of curious people […]. Some rejoiced at the sight of the delightful spectacle […]. Stunned and perplexed I remained motionless and paralyzed. I looked at the*

hanged man. It was the first time in my life I saw a man being hanged. […] He sacrificed his life for an innocent and loyal ideal he believed in.(52)

Salim felt that "as a communist and as a Jew, Sadiq struggled all his life for justice. This time he died for it."(53) Nonetheless, the atrocious sight left an important mark on his life. Salim was haunted by nightmares in which he saw himself tortured and hanged, just like his hero.

Salim's descriptions juxtapose the cheerfulness and exhilaration of the crowd from the sight of the hanged Jewish communist, with his own trauma and identification with the victim, thus accentuating Salim's isolation and sense of alienation. Moreover, his identification with Sadiq is the most profound, since the latter was an Iraqi communist and a Jew. The execution, however, is understood in terms of Iraqi patriotism, predominantly because Sadiq is seen as a man willing to make the ultimate sacrifice for the sake of justice in Iraq. Salim's account likewise demonstrates the pervasive nature of state's violence as the state's gruesome spectacle is translated into the most personal realm to torment Salim in his dreams. The fact that several arrests and executions were done following the betrayal of one of the party's leaders, Malik Sayyif, increased Salim's fears and sense of paranoia.

Salim goes on to detailing the difficulties of surviving under state's terror, in a period when Jews were constantly fired from their positions and even arrested, being blamed for either communism or Zionism (or both!) on an unprecedented scale. He likewise bemoans the execution of Jews by the state; businessman Shafiq 'Addas, Zionists like Judah Basri, and communists like Sadiq and Sassun Dallal.(54) On a personal level, Salim felt he was unable to survive in Iraq. After his arrest, he was marked as a suspicious man. He lived in fear since a detective was assigned to monitor his every move. Finally, a Jewish friend of his, David Sassun, himself a communist, was willing to help him and arranged his escape from Iraq, first to Iran and then for Israel.

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The means of surveillance and persecution demarcated by Salim might not seem as

severe today, after the experiences of the Ba'thi regime. Salim often details the manners by which he was able to escape state's surveillance, pointing to the fact that his immediate environment was able to protect him: his employers lied to police detectives about his whereabouts so that he would not be located in suspicious places, and his family lied on his behalf and burned his books when the police searched his home in order to save him. Bribery and personal connections were always useful methods to avoid state's violence and they were indeed employed in order to secure Salim's release from jail. Nonetheless Salim portrays an environment in which the pervasive power of the state enters every fabric of life and where the separation between public and private is rendered impossible. After the Wathba, persecution follows Salim in his school, in his own home, and in the city's streets. Surveillance (by fellow students, the school's principle and the state's police) was almost inescapable and fears and paranoia shaped Salim's mentality.

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The power of the autobiography emanates from its ability to register the psychological effects of the historical events on the life of one individual and thus to highlight the insidious means of state power. The text, moreover, links this state's violence to notions of religious difference, as Salim came to believe that his entire community was persecuted.

Salim's personal account corresponds to a few historical processes. Historian Nissim Kazzaz notes that Iraq's leadership in these years, fearful of the "red peril," ceased to see Iraqi Jews as a loyal and productive element in Iraqi society given the ability of the ICP to attract a large number of Jewish activists.[55] In addition, the combination of the war in Palestine, the establishment of the state of Israel and the inability of certain Iraqi ultranationalists to separate Zionism from Judaism sealed the fate of the Jewish-Iraqi community and caused its majority to migrate from Iraq in the 1950s.[56] Salim identifies the persecution of both Jews and Iraqi communists as the fundamental

reasons for his departure from his homeland. In other words, the state's violence, which was not only directed against Jews, but against all those suspected in dissident and rebellious activities, also prompted his own migration. This argument presents an important counter-narrative to the representations of the Iraqi Jewish migration to Israel as conceptualized in Zionist historiography. This migration was not the result of the labor of the Zionist underground, as presented in this historiography, but rather of Salim's sense that both of the communities to which he belonged, that of Iraqi Jewry and that of Iraq's communists, could not survive in Iraq. Thus, despite the promise in the book's blurb to provide much information about the cruelty of Arab-Iraqi society, the personal account often provides a careful separation between the state – antidemocratic, violent and insidious – from which Salim was forced to escape, and society – Salim's communist peers, the urban Jewish poor populating his neighborhood, and Salim's schoolmates – whom Salim cherished and loved.

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Conclusions

Salim's autobiography complicates our understanding of the dynamics of social movements in the Middle East. Instead of focusing (as the leaders of the ICP had done) on the Leninist doctrine of leadership, whose mission was to raise the proletariat to an awareness of the socialist ideal, the autobiography reflects on the meaning of being a communist in Iraq of the years 19481950-. The text subsequently attempts to explicate what motivated a young man to join the ranks of the communist underground, and what convinced him to stay a loyal member, despite state's surveillance

and supervision.

Salim's narrative does not equate communism with an abandonment of his religious identity; never in the text does he speak of hostility towards Judaism. While he criticizes the Jewish religious education for its negligence of scientific principles and violence, Salim explicates that communism enabled him to retain his Jewish-ness without feeling that his Jewish identity, which he was unwilling to forsake, stood in contradiction to, or jeopardized, his allegiance with, and love of, the Iraqi nation.

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The text likewise exposes the hybrid and localized version of communism in Iraq. The autobiography, in other words, discloses not only the localization of the international movement of communism in the Iraqi context, but also, and more significantly, the localization of the ideas of the ICP itself within the poor neighborhood of Baghdad. Chronicling the private, rather than the collective, domain, the text does not speak about specific sociopolitical groups against which the communist youth wanted to rebel. There is little mentioning of the monarchy (especially Regent 'Abd al-Ilah, who was despised in leftist circles), of the landowners, the Sherifians and the tribal sheikhs, and of the industrial and non-industrial bourgeoisie and the petty bourgeois, despite the fact that these social groups and classes featured prominently in the communist publications of the time. Similarly there is little mentioning of the role of Great Britain as the representative of international capitalism and imperialism in the Middle East. These ideas do appear in the text: they appear as slogans on posters communist demonstrators carry, discussed in cells and shouted at demonstrations. Yet the importance of the text originates from its ability to illustrate how, for certain Jews, joining the ICP was a reaction to the 1941 coup and the Farhud, to their poverty, to generational changes amongst the Jewish intelligentsia, and to their search of social justice. Although the Hebrew text ultimately registers the failure of such efforts, it likewise celebrates ideas of Iraqi camaraderie formed in a poor Jewish Iraqi neighborhood in the years 19481950-.

Notes

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